

Love Wins

Chapter 1

- **Opening Prayer**
Heavenly Father, reading about Hell troubles us... especially for our non-Christian friends and family. Open our hearts to a better understanding of the nature of your ultimate Kingdom. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.
- **Introductory Video for the Chapter (from the Kindle Enhanced Edition)**
- **Chapter 1 – What About the Flat Tire?**
 - What experiences have you had with people pronouncing eternal judgement on others, as was the case with the Gandhi example Rob Bell provides?
 - How do you reconcile the question of what happens to the billions and billions of non-Christians when they die?
 - What do you think Hell is like?
 - What are your thoughts on the concept of an “age of accountability,” prior to which we are not held responsible for our actions?
 - Why might a non-member think that all that matters to our church is getting to Heaven?
 - [8] Bell poses the question of whether our future is actually in someone else’s hands, and provides the example from which the chapter is titled – “What if the missionary gets a flat tire?”
 - How much of our conversion is attributed to people in our lives vs. God himself?
 - [10] Why do you think the phrase/requirement of a “personal relationship with Christ” has resonated so much over the last century?
 - [11] Bell provides several examples in scripture that suggest roads to salvation:
 - What you do
 - What you say
 - Being “born again”
 - Forgiving others
 - Standing firm
 - Who your friends are or what they do
 - Who you’re married to
 - Etc.
 - Personally, what elements do you consider roads to salvation?
 - Other reflections?
- **Closing Prayer (take turns among class members)**

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FYI, I did not personally use this guide. To be honest, I didn't even know it existed until we were done with the book. I'm sure it has additional content that would enhance the provided lesson plans.

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Chapter 2

- **Opening Prayer**

Lord God, we thank you for the promise of the coming age, and yearn for a better understanding of how to realize a heavenly existence in the here and now. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

- **Introductory Video for the Chapter (from the Kindle Enhanced Edition)**

- **Chapter 2 – Here is the New There**

- Bell recalls an ominous painting in his grandmother's house. What images do you remember from homes of family members in your childhood?
- Some things just seem to stick with us from our childhood.
 - What examples can you think of that continue to impact you as a Christian adult?
- What do you think heaven is like?
- Why do you think heaven is so frequently depicted as *somewhere else*?
- How much of Christian teaching today do you think is focused on achieving eternal life?
- Have someone read Matthew 19:16
 - How would you respond to the man?
- Have someone read Matthew 19:17
 - What strikes you as interesting about Jesus' initial response?
- Have someone read Matthew 19:18-19
 - Why do you think Jesus just lists these five commandments, and not the first four?
 - Which one did Jesus add to the ten?
- [28] "Heaven, for Jesus, was deeply connected with what he called "this age" and "the age to come."
 - Why does Bell draw this conclusion?
 - How does this change your interpretation of heaven?
- Bell examines what the prophets had to say about the present and future ages:
 - They spoke about *everybody* participating in the world to come
 - The world to come is *earthy*, implying this world transformed and renewed
 - They drew from the Genesis story of Adam and Eve
- What inspiration do you draw from these observations?
- [40] Returning to the story of the rich man, Bell points out that Jesus also excludes the tenth commandment to not covet. He then brings it out when he tells the man to sell his possessions.
 - What do you think Jesus meant when he said "...and you will have treasure in heaven"?
- In what ways do you see Christians falling into the temptation of not doing anything about the world today because they plan on going somewhere else after they die?
- [49] "What we find Jesus teaching...is that he's interested in our hearts being transformed, so that we can actually handle heaven."
 - In what ways might heaven be hard for you or others to handle?
- Other reflections?

- **Closing Prayer (take turns among class members)**

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Chapter 3

- **Opening Prayer**

Dear Lord, the concept of Hell, in whatever form it's portrayed, frightens us. Help us to understand what you intend us to know about Hell, and how we can live our lives avoiding it. In Christ's name. Amen.

- **Introductory Video for the Chapter (from the Kindle Enhanced Edition)**

- **Chapter 3 – Hell**

- How were you raised in your thinking about hell?
- How would you describe your current thoughts on hell to a non-believer?
- Bell points out what OT scripture has to say about the realm of the dead:
 - God has power over life and death (e.g., 1 Samuel 2)
 - The Hebrew sense of “life” and “death” was different from our usage today
 - Life and death were considered two ways of being alive
 - How would you reconcile the concept of death being a form of life? (*i.e., how you choose to live*)
 - *Hebrews were more interested in the ethics of living this life than the Egyptians who were obsessed with the afterlife*
 - *In general, Hebrews weren't specific or even that much interested in what happened after death*
- Bell then discusses NT references
 - The Greek word translated to “hell” is “Gehenna” – which was the city dump for Jerusalem
 - Fire was burning there constantly
 - Wild animals would fight and gnash their teeth over the trash
 - How does this interpretation of “hell” as an actual place in Jerusalem affect your interpretation of hell?
 - *Two other Greek words for post-death places:*
 - *Tartarus – underworld from Greek mythology (2 Peter 2)*
 - *Hades – Greek form of Sheol (Revelation, Acts 2, Matthew 11 & 16, Luke 10 & 16)*
 - Bell describes several modern-day experiences that are a literal hell:
 - Butchered children in Rwanda
 - Raped women
 - Orphaned children due to suicide
 - Can you think of other examples where all love, grace, and humanity are rejected?
- Have someone read Luke 16:19-31 – The Rich Man and Lazarus
 - Do you remember what Bell pointed out that revealed the Rich Man's continuing bad character? *He asked that Lazarus serve him by warning his family*
 - What did you think of this observation?
- Bell points out that Jesus calls for a social revolution in the book of Luke
 - How do you see this to be true?
- [78] “Some people are primarily concerned with systemic evils...Others are primarily concerned with individual sins”
 - “Often the people most concerned about others going to hell when they die seem less concerned with the hells on earth right now, while the people most concerned with the hells on earth right now seem the least concerned about hell after death.
 - Which of these two perspectives do you gravitate more toward?

- Bell points out that Jesus is primarily talking to the Jews when presenting warnings while Christians frequently talk about non-Christians when discussing who will go to hell.
 - What does this say to you?
 - Have someone read Lamentations 3:1-9, 22, 31
 - What does this say to you about God's nature?
 - Bell uses these verses (and others) to highlight the importance of restoration to God
 - Have someone read 1 Corinthians 5:1, 5
 - What do you think Paul means to hand this man over to Satan?
 - Bell describes it as an "intense experience of correction"
 - What do you think about hell being for correction rather than for punishment?
 - Other reflections?
- **Closing Prayer (take turns among class members)**

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Chapter 4

- **Opening Prayer**

Heavenly Father, help us to open our minds to more respectful thinking, honoring all your children and not just the ones with whom we agree. In Jesus' precious name. Amen.

- **Introductory Video for the Chapter (from the Kindle Enhanced Edition)**

- What is your reaction to the concept of God's focus being on "all things"?

- **Chapter 4 – Does God Get What God Wants?**

- How do you reconcile the claims that God is in control, God wants all people to be saved, and billions of people will spend forever apart from God?
- Do you think God draws a line that prevents salvation?
 - If not, why do so many claim He does?
- Would God consider someone choosing to be apart from Him a failure?
- Do you think God will succeed in His desire to have all people saved?

- **Read Luke 15:1-10 aloud**

- Have someone summarize the Prodigal Son parable in their own words
- What do you think Jesus is trying to get across with all of these parables?

- **Chapter 4 (Continued)**

- *Different perspectives:*
 - *You get one life, this one, to believe in Jesus*
 - *Corollary - We can choose to nurture the divine image in us or deny/stifle it*
 - *There are two realities after death, but we get some sort of "second chance" if you don't believe in Jesus during your lifetime*
 - *There are multiple chances after you die*
- Bell notes later that Christianity is big enough to handle the vast range of these perspectives.
 - Why do you think various Christian traditions promote a single perspective as "the way"?
- [103] "If at any point God overrides, co-opts, or hijacks the human heart, robbing us of our freedom to choose, then God has violated the fundamental essence of what love even is."
 - Do you agree with Rob Bell that love is incompatible with robbing us of the freedom to choose?
- [104] "Could a person reach the point of no longer bearing the image of God?... 'formerly human' or 'posthuman' or even 'ex-human?'"
- [112] Bell wonders how someone could opt out of a universe of love and joy right in front of them. He answers himself by saying that people do this all the time.
 - Can you think of examples of people consciously making this choice?
- *Observations about the book of Revelation*
 - *Heaven's world is free from evils*
 - *The gates of this new world will never shut*
 - *God is making everything "new"*
- What does Bell mean when he writes: "It's not 'Does God get what God wants?' but 'Do we get what we want?' And the answer to that is a resounding...yes"
- In the Apostles' Creed, Catholics include "He descended into Hell" before "the third day He rose again from the dead."
 - Why do you think the United Methodist Church left out this phrase in the 1903 hymnal, following suit with other US Evangelical churches?

- Other reflections?
 - **Closing Prayer (take turns among class members)**
-

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Chapter 5

- **Opening Prayer**

Lord God, open our eyes and hearts to new meanings of the symbol of the cross, as we ponder the ultimate sacrifice you made for us. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

- **Introductory Video for the Chapter (from the Kindle Enhanced Edition)**

- Jesus' disciples were willing to die to support their claim that Jesus was resurrected.
 - What things would you die for?

- **Chapter 5 – Dying to Live**

- Where are the places you've seen the cross displayed?
 - Do you think there are inappropriate places for this symbol?
 - Has the cross's ubiquity desensitized you to it?
- What do you think was the actual transaction that occurred on the cross?
- How might have the Jews of Jesus' day viewed differently the concept of him being a "sacrifice" than we do today?
 - Does this either weaken or strengthen its impact on us today?
 - How do you think Jews of Jesus' time reacted to the concept of Jesus' sacrifice putting an end to the need for all future sacrifices?
- Rob Bell points out different takes on the cross. Do any of these resonate with you?...
 - End of a sacrificial system
 - Broken relationship that's been reconciled
 - Guilty defendant who's been set free
 - Battle that's been won
 - Redemption of something that was lost
- How meaningful are the words *sacrifice, atonement, justification, redemption, and victory* to you?
- What other resurrection / "life after death" situations in life can you think of? *Compost, cocoon, military or first responders giving their lives for others, organ donors*
- [135] What does Bell mean when he writes "When we cling with white knuckles to our sins and our hostility, we're like a tree that won't let its leaves go."
- Bell closes the chapter with an answer to his own question – "...we want to know on Friday that Sunday will eventually come. That is why the cross continues to endure. It's a reminder, a sign, a glimpse, an icon that allows us to tap into our deepest longings to be part of a new creation."
 - How does this or doesn't it work for you?
- Other reflections?

- **Closing Prayer (take turns among class members)**

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Chapter 6

- **Opening Prayer**

Dear God, we acknowledge that our human minds cannot grasp your full purpose for us as your Creation. Help us to better understand how we all fit in your great plan, including our non-Christian brothers and sisters. In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

- **Introductory Video for the Chapter (from the Kindle Enhanced Edition)**

- What does it mean to say that Jesus holds all things together?
- Do you think we Christians “appropriate” Jesus too much for ourselves?
 - How do you feel about Muslims treating Jesus as a prophet?

- **Chapter 6 – There Are Rocks Everywhere**

- Bell tells the story of a man smoking pot and drawing at his kitchen table when he’s overwhelmed with the presence of God and the assurance that he was loved unconditionally and that he was called to follow Jesus. Bell says this is one of many bizarre stories he’s heard.
 - Have you heard similar stories to this?
 - What is your reaction when you hear them?
- Have a volunteer read 1 Corinthians 10:1-4
 - What do you think about Paul’s claim that the rock from which the wandering Hebrews drank was actually Jesus?
 - How does this change your impression of the story in Exodus?
- What does it mean to you to say that Jesus is the Word of God?
 - Why do you think John chose to use this imagery?
- Bell says Jesus is bigger than any religion. We can’t claim him to be ours any more than any other can claim him to be theirs.
 - Do you agree? Why or why not?
- Bell claims many Christians get uneasy with the prospect of opening salvation up to Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and even other denominations.
 - In what ways do you feel such unease?
- Bell closes the chapter with a few observations about how this understanding of Jesus connects with the eternal fate of everyone:
 - People come to find Jesus in many different ways.
 - How did you discover Jesus?
 - Nobody has or will corner the market on Jesus
 - We must be careful about making judgments about people’s eternal destinies
- When do you think God started his plan to rescue and reconcile humanity?
 - What was he rescuing us from?
- John 14:6 (I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.)
 - What do you think “through me” means here?
- Other reflections?

- **Closing Prayer (take turns among class members)**

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Chapter 7

- **Opening Prayer**

Lord God, teach us to listen to the story you are writing for us, and help us to be open to change in our lives to embrace it. In Christ's holy name we pray. Amen.

- **Introductory Video for the Chapter (from the Kindle Enhanced Edition)**

- What do you think about the concept of you living in your own story?

- **Read Luke 15:11-32**

- For you, who do the characters in this parable represent?
- Bell says that in the end, the father changes the older brother's story.
 - In what ways do you see this?
- How did the father change the younger brother's story about himself?
- Why is it harder for the older brother to accept his father's story about himself than the younger brother?
- How has God changed your story?

- **Chapter 7 – The Good News is Better Than That**

- [168] “most images and understandings people have of heaven and hell are conceived of in terms of separation... Jesus puts the older brother right there at the party... Hell is being at the party.”
 - What is Bell getting at here? “*Hell is our refusal to trust God's retelling of our story.*”
- [173] “God would, in essence, become a fundamentally different being to them in that moment of death, a different being to them *forever*. A loving heavenly father who will go to extraordinary lengths to have a relationship with them would, in the blink of an eye, become a cruel, mean, vicious tormenter who would ensure that they had no escape from an endless future of agony.”
 - How do Christians reconcile this observation?
 - How would a non-believer view this?
 - If you were taught this, why did it not drive you away?
- [178] Bell talks about the “gospel of goats” bound up in fear. He says this leaves Christians with having to explain why others are enjoying life so much and they're not.
 - Do you ever feel like non-believers are having more fun?
 - In what ways does your perspective change when you stop treating the gospel as about an entrance or ticket to heaven and rather about enjoyment and participation in God's kingdom?
 - How does your local church treat the gospel?
- [185] Bell says the older brother is just as separated from his father as the prodigal son. Both our badness and our goodness can separate us from God's love.
 - How do you see this to be the case?
- Other reflections?

- **Closing Prayer (take turns among class members)**

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Chapter 8

- **Opening Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we thank you for inspirational Christians who stretch our minds to better understand you and your work in our world. We know that in the end, your love will always win. In your Son's precious name we pray. Amen.

- **Introductory Video - [YouTube \("Rob Bell vs Adrian Warnock"\)](#)** – (especially 13:00-15:23)

- In what ways do you feel a sense of urgency in your faith?
- What does it mean to "live like the end is here, now, today"?

- **Chapter 8**

- Do you have a childhood memory similar to Rob Bell's when he accepted God's love in Jesus?
- In what ways are childhood conversions more or less important to our faith?
- [194] "over time we get our guard up, we don't easily believe anything and trust can become like a foreign tongue, a language we used to speak but now we find ourselves out of practice."
 - If you agree, why does this happen?
 - Is this healthy?
- Other reflections?

- **Final Thoughts**

- What are your overall reflections of *Love Wins*?
- How would you characterize Rob Bell?

- **[Optional] Either in your group setting, or prior to class, have members watch the movie [The Heretic](#) (available via streaming)**

- What does Rob Bell mean by religion becoming "all treble and no bass"?
- Can you take inclusivity too far?
- How do you think Jesus would react if he knew people were starting a religion in his name?
- What's your reaction to Bell's claim that post-Darwinism, it seems we've got "scientists without a soul and religious people who don't have a mind"?
- What is Bell getting at when he says that our societal growth [in terms of law, morals, and ethics] is the best argument for us being something more than just "the sum of our cells"?

- **Closing Prayer (take turns among class members)**

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